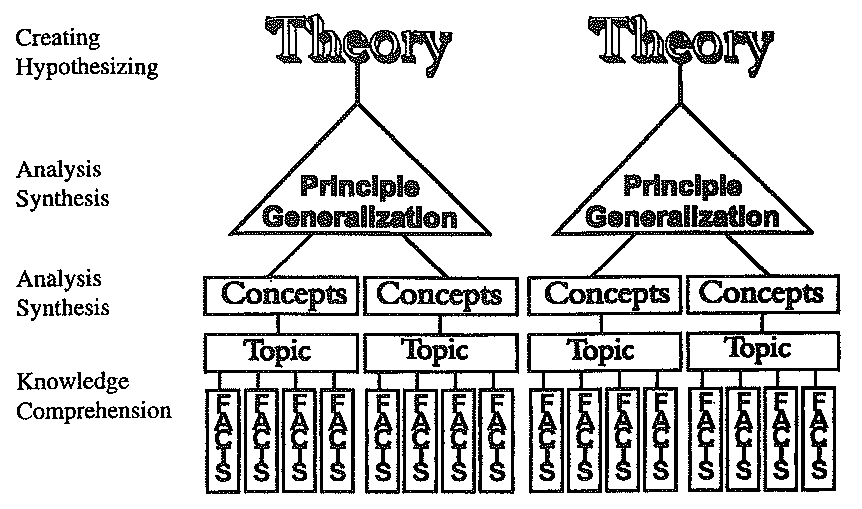
**Concept-Based Curriculum**

How is it that other industrialized nations can score better than the United States on international exams when they focus on fewer topics? And how do they make the decisions as to which topics to include in the curriculum? The answers to these questions relate directly to the chosen emphasis for curricular and instructional design.

Japan, Singapore, and other high-scoring nations center both curriculum and instruction around the understanding of discipline-based concepts and principles. They use topics and facts as tool to help students develop deeper understanding. This conceptual focus allows them to reduce the number of topics covered, because so many topics exemplify the same concepts and conceptual understandings. Honoring elders is a Japanese tradition. These concepts of "honor" and "tradition," and the associated understandings, are characterized through a wide variety of family, civic, and ceremonial situations.

Another difference between the United States and higher-scoring nations in the TIMSS study relates to instruction. Teachers in the United States feel compelled to "cover" the abundant subject area content in the textbooks and curriculum guides. This coverage pressure reduces the amount of time available for students to problem solve and think beyond the facts. It also encourages didactic lecture formats rather than active student learning.

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Trying to teach in the 21st century without a conceptual schema for knowledge is like trying to build a house without a blueprint. Where do the pieces go? It is too late to wait until high school and college to "dump" key concepts and conceptual ideas on students.

*H.Lynn Erickson*

*Concept-Based Curriculum and Instruction (2002)*